



U.S. Coast Guard Oral History Program

Attack on America: September 11, 2001 and the U.S. Coast Guard

U.S. COAST GUARD ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM
Operation Noble Eagle Documentation Project

Interviewee: Rear Admiral Terry M. Cross, USCG
Assistant Commandant for Operations (G-O)

Interviewer: PAC Peter Capelotti, USCGR
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Place: G-O Offices, Coast Guard Headquarters

Q: You've been Director of Operations since 2000?

RADM Cross: About two years.

Q: Were you here on the morning of the 11th?

RADM Cross: I was.

Q: Where were you? Were you in this office?

RADM Cross: I was in my office when I got a phone call from the Command Center reporting the first aircraft had crashed in New York. Interestingly enough, the initial report was that it was a light plane. You mentioned earlier I'm an aviator. I looked outside. It was a beautiful day with not a cloud in the sky, and I knew that this was not an accident.

I went to the Command Center. At that point someone had figured out that it wasn't a light plane. It was an airliner of some sort. The initial report was that it was a [Boeing] 737, which in a silhouette looks a little bit like a [Boeing] 767.

Then I went to the Vice Commandant's [VADM Thomas H. Collins, USCG] office. He had the news on, and he and I were talking about next steps and what Coast Guard involvement might be, when the second aircraft hit.

Q: So you were in the Vice Commandant's office when that happened?

RADM Cross: Yes.

Q: Was there anyone else besides you two?

RADM Cross: No, I think it was just he and I at that point. Then we almost immediately started standing up the Incident Management Team down in the Command Center, talked with the Area Commanders, and began plotting a course ahead in terms of actions that we would take. Then of course he also had some concerns to deal with just in the building here, as you might suspect, especially after the third crash into the Pentagon. There were many people anxious to leave town.

I had my own minor burden, there was a report - my wife works over at the State Department - there had been what turned out to be a false report of a car bomb over at the State Department.

Q: Let me ask you. I think it was someone on the Commandant's Staff who told me that it was you that morning - while the senior officers were gathered watching this on TV - who said either to the Commandant or to the people at large that this was a massive failure of intelligence. Was that you?

RADM Cross: I might have said something like that. Clearly if the purpose of intelligence is to give you advance warning about bad things that could happen to your country, then it was a failure. That's not necessarily an indictment of the intelligence community. I think over the years we've done a lot to emasculate the intelligence community, and the fact that it failed in this case was not an indictment of those individuals.

Q: What was your sense of the senior leadership that morning? When did it, how quickly, and what was your sense of how quickly it dawned on everyone that this was going to be a national event?

RADM Cross: Well not long at all. I went down to talk to the Vice and my initial message for him was that airplanes don't just fly into buildings on clear, calm days. This was an intentional event.

Q: What was his response? Do you remember how he responded that morning?

RADM Cross: I think he had probably already figured that out by himself. But the Commandant [ADM James M. Loy, USCG] that morning - I mean before we got very far along at all had - I recall him making a statement something to the effect that life in this country will never be the same again. I think what he was referring to was he initially saw that there would be a need for greater security across the board.

Q: Was that your feeling as well?

RADM Cross: Yes. I don't want to suggest that we were the only ones who saw the potential for a terrorist attack. But you can take a look at Coast Guard strategic documents and they were very prophetic. We had been working - a relatively small organization like the Coast Guard in the Federal Government - we had been working hard to put together what we called a Maritime Domain Awareness Effort within government. We'd signed a Memorandum of Agreement the previous January to do that with the Department of Defense, the Department of State, and the Immigration and Naturalization Service to try to move this idea forward to improve our intelligence picture, at least on the maritime side. So we had pretty serious concerns right along that something like this could happen. I think we certainly didn't have the notion that people would

hijack airliners and fly them into buildings. I think we were more concerned about weapons of mass destruction being smuggled in, either aboard ships or in containers. And that's still a concern of ours.

Q: As a Coast Guard officer who's also an aviator, did it surprise you that as it turned out, 19 guys without guns could pull something like this off?

RADM Cross: Well no, not really.

Q: Why is that?

RADM Cross: I think we are all aware that aircraft have been hijacked and flown to foreign countries. I suspect the passengers on at least the first two aircraft and maybe even the first three aircraft thought at worst maybe they were going for a ride to Iran or Iraq or someplace, and they would likely be let go. They likely didn't know what they were in for. Of course we'd all learn later that the terrorists invested a great deal of money to go to flying school. But reality is that flying an airplane straight and level isn't the hardest thing to do in the world.

Q: Especially when you don't have any objective. I mean you don't have to land it.

RADM Cross: I mean in fairness to them, there was a bit of a navigational challenge, although it was a beautiful clear day. The challenges of flying airplanes are associated with knowing all the rules. They didn't likely know the rule or know the proper procedures to respond to emergencies. And my guess is they'd had been in trouble had there been a serious emergency, but there wasn't. And you know landing and taking off under instrument conditions, those are the kinds of things that require high levels of skill. I guess that's the reason I'm not surprised that it could be done. In retrospect I hadn't really thought about it.

Q: Well yeah, that's kind of where I was going. I would like to sort of turn it around the other way and ask you; everybody's initial response when that first plane went down on September 11th was it was such a crazy event that it had to be an accident or some kind of weird thing. And the word terrorism, at least from us watching from the outside on television, didn't come up for hours. Yet we're in an environment now where I think when anything happens the automatic assumption is to assume terrorism. So in that sense I think we've seen a culture shift.

RADM Cross: I think there were large numbers of people in government who pretty much knew right away that's exactly what happened. They certainly had indications that the aircraft had been hijacked. The FAA [Federal Aviation Administration] has tapes, and like I said earlier, perfectly good airplanes don't fly into buildings on crystal clear, calm days.

Q: As things developed that morning and subsequent days - as Head of Operations for the Service - what were your, as we took this - as the Commandant described it - sharp turn toward Port Security, what were your concerns for the cutter force, the boat force and the aircraft?

RADM Cross: Well first of all the Coast Guard is first and foremost a response organization, and we responded in the way we typically respond. I didn't have a lot of short-term concerns. Those are the kinds of things that - the short-term operational concerns - those are issues that the operational commanders manage ... and they did. We're the operations policy and resource shops so we started working with the field commanders to allow them to work as hard as they could work while also expressing concern about burning people and equipment out because we knew we couldn't run that hard forever. We started working with our human resources folks to initiate a large Reserve recall, and eventually we got over a third of the Reserve forces mobilized fairly quickly. Then we started to work on a longer-term plan or strategy that would define what the Commandant termed the, "new normalcy." We assumed that he was correct, and I think by

that point virtually everybody in the country would have agreed, that yes, at least for the foreseeable future things are not going to be the way they were before. We assumed there would be a need for enhanced security, and we tried to take a, not a Coast Guard view, but a broader view in terms of trying to develop a strategy. The Commandant really worked this very well.

Q: Was this due to his broader vision that he asked you all to look at in the broader context?

RADM Cross: I believe it was. First of all, you need to understand we also stood up the Incident Management Team. We were getting intelligence briefs at least once a day, every day, and we were all working seven days a week. The Coast Guard was only one organization within government that was mobilizing and we saw increased information sharing and also cooperation throughout government. But we knew we needed to have a larger plan in terms of what we were going to do to enhance the security of the maritime requirement over the long term. Primarily the Assistant Commandant for Marine Safety and Environmental Protection [RADM Paul J. Pluta, USCG] and myself - our people - sat down and worked literally seven days a week to develop this strategy. It was reviewed, and it evolved through a number of iterations, fairly quickly. We are essentially executing the elements of that strategy today, both in terms of the supplemental budgets that went forward and the Fiscal Year 03 budget that's currently on the Hill, and on the 04 budget that we're building now. We enjoyed great support from the Department of Transportation and at Office of Management and Budget [OMB]. I was with the Commandant, when we briefed it to Governor [Thomas] Ridge. So I think people were pleased when we took a leadership role and the Coast Guard was one of the first organizations to come forward with a specific strategy to address at least what we saw as our responsibilities to the American people. To his credit, the Commandant also offered Coast Guard assistance to other organizations. For example we sent a number of people to the Office of Homeland Security and essentially stood up their Situation Room for them. We offered significant assistance to the new Transportation Security Agency. So while we were all working very, very hard ourselves, we were exporting Coast Guard people and Coast Guard expertise to help others.

Q: If 9-11 had never happened, would we still be dealing with what we had before; the 15 percent reduction in operations and all of those, and struggling through all of that?

RADM Cross: Well the Fiscal Year 02 Budget was essentially a done deal. So yes. I mean I can't imagine that we wouldn't have. I think we would have pushed back in the 03 budget to try to recover some, or all of that. But yes, I think that would have been a big problem for us.

Q: Do you - you've had some six, seven months hindsight now - look upon 9-11 in the same way, or are you starting to look kind of the same way as say the OPA-90 [Oil Spill Pollution Act of 1990], the Cuban [Mariel] boatlift, and so forth? Is this going to be seen as an historic day in Coast Guard history?

RADM Cross: I wouldn't compare it to the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 because we know it was linked to the *Exxon Valdez* oil spill. I mean that was a real tragedy but nobody died. Maybe a better parallel would be the Texas City accident [a fire on board the French-owned Liberty Ship *Grandcamp*, loading ammonium nitrate at Texas City, Texas, on 16 April 1947, caused the vessel to explode, leveling the area and killing and injuring hundreds] which killed large numbers of people and paved the way for an evolution in marine safety. I think the answer's absolutely. All you have to do is look and see what's happening in organizations all around the country. As a people we tend to need to experience a defining event in order to move out and make the kind of investment that a lot of us probably are pretty sure we needed to make anyway. The fact that we could experience a terrorist attack should not have been news. The specifics were unexpected but the idea that something like this could happen was one of the hot topics around town. We had the Hart-Rudman Commission and the Gilmore Commission. I mean there were a lot of smart people concerned about the possibility of a terrorist attack.

Q: In sort of a general sense.

RADM Cross: Yes. But what we weren't doing was making any real investment as a nation, either in terms of preventing it or developing responses.

Q: Let me ask you, one of the cultural things that is interesting to me since I came on active duty was this dichotomy in the Service between the "O" [Operations] folks and the "M" [Marine Safety] folks. Could you speak to that as an outsider, as to your view of that?

RADM Cross: Well it simply reflects the different specialties in operations. When we talk about operations people, we're talking about the people who operate the boats, sail the ships and fly the aircraft. Those are the operators. The Marine Safety people tend to be inspectors; more regulatory oriented and more conversive in working directly with private industry. So each have different backgrounds. But we recognized many years ago that there needed to be much closer cooperation between Operators and Marine Safety people, and that there were substantive gains to be made by doing that. So over the years - at least for the past five, six, seven years - we've seen a steady march toward a much closer collaboration, both at the field level and at the Headquarters planning level. After September 11th those efforts were accelerated.

Q: So September 11th, if anything, brought those more to the floor as something that needed to be done?

RADM Cross: Well think about it. We needed to enhance port security and most of the Captain of Ports are in fact marine safety officers. But most of the required skill sets and resources are managed by operators. For example, you need boat drivers. You need law enforcement-capable people, and you need port security-capable people. Those are all programs managed by Operations. So we had to come together - even more so than we had previously, not only in the Headquarters arena for planning and programming and budgeting, but also in the field where it became absolutely critical to have a unity of effort in our ports. Moreover, because part of our plan had been to and certainly was post-September 11th, to reach out to other Federal agencies and even state and local agencies. We became a leader/coordinator of efforts. This is a role that played before, but it became much more critical on September 11th. There has never been enough Coast Guard to do everything required of us. We were not exactly the nadir, but a pretty low point in terms of numbers of people in the active duty-Coast Guard; down to about 34,000 people. Hence, we seek partnerships.

Q: One of the numbers that surprised me - it took me a while to find it - was that we had - I interviewed [Vice] Admiral [Timothy W.] Josiah yesterday and he said that's wrong. He's going to get me the right numbers. But the numbers that I have from here at Headquarters is that we had 984 reservists on extended active duty on September 10th.

RADM Cross: That doesn't surprise me.

Q: So if you add in . . . I think at the height it was something like 2,700 plus that we activated. We're up to something like 47 percent of the Reserve that was . . . when you figure the people that were already on active duty . . .

RADM Cross: I don't know if that 900 number is included in the 2,700 or not.

Q: No it wasn't.

RADM Cross: It was not?

Q: It was not, according to the people that keep the figures. Anyway, they say that's what I wanted. I wanted a baseline to measure the surge. So that would have put us close to 3,800.

RADM Cross: Well it doesn't surprise me. A terrific response from the Reserves by the way. I know of one of Admiral Josiah's concerns; and there are two concerns when you bring in large numbers of reservists. The first one - and maybe the most practical one - is how are you going to pay them. It's a budget issue. The second is; just like the active duty, you have to be concerned about wearing out your Reserve Force. People join the Reserves with the expectation of - well you maybe know more about that than I do - but our view is, is that people join the Reserves with the expectation that they will be called upon to respond to national emergencies for relatively short periods of time. If they wanted to be in the active-duty-Coast Guard that was certainly an option that was available to them. So we became concerned fairly early on that we could deplete the Reserve by overusing them. We knew that we were going to have to require some substantial numbers of Reserves for at least a year, and maybe longer. So, there were pressures on us from both a fiscal perspective and a reserve management perspective to get those numbers down. We're down to a little over 1,800 now. But based on a lot of the feedback that we're getting, the Reserve community, certainly with some exceptions, responded and there's not a lot of backpressure coming from the Reserves to reduce those numbers. I mean they're ready to stay and do the work that needs to be done as long as we need them. This is of typical Coast Guard, and I'm pleased to see that.

Q: I'd like to return to that but I wanted to go back to this "M"/"O" thing for a moment. If you were just talking to - let's say - an outside audience and you say we have inspectors and operators. What are the underlying themes that make them both Coast Guard people; Coast Guard officers and Coast Guard enlisted? In other words, if you talk to a Marine they'll say every Marine's a rifleman. Do we have a similar ethos in the Coast Guard?

RADM Cross: Well, I think we do in a number of ways. Certainly one of the themes that all Coast Guard people are lifesavers, and we're all concerned with the safety of the public. The Marine Safety people tend to focus more on prevention and operators tend to focus on response, and we need both. My hats off to the Marine Safety people. When I became 17th District Commander, one of my themes was prevention, because three good things happen when you prevent an accident. The first one is nobody gets hurt. The second one is it costs the taxpayer less money. And the third thing is that I don't have to lay awake at night while my boat crews and aircrews are out there in 80-knot winds and 40-foot seas. The Coast Guard people don't go at risk.

Q: I dug around in the Abstract of Operations and grafted out some numbers from September 10th through the 13th and I wonder if that coincides with the view that you had from your position?

RADM Cross: Yes, absolutely. We knew all these things were happening.

Q: How does information like that come to you? How do you get those things from the field?

RADM Cross: Like this.

Q: Like somebody puts a graph on your desk. But do you also get that total information from the field?

RADM Cross: Yes, but it's not something we were concerned about in the short term. First of all, Search and Rescue [SAR] declined a little bit. But the reason it declined is that people were staying home. We answered all the SAR cases just like we always do.

Q: Sure. That's a good point, yes. I think my aviation graph is in here.

RADM Cross: So what you saw, the one here that concerned me the most in the short term was the decrease in Aids to Navigation. We took buoy tenders and used them to maintain presence in the waterways. We actually had one in the river outside my window for a while. I was concerned because over time when you don't maintain navigation aids, then the risk of having a grounding accident increases. If a tanker grounded and spilled thousands of gallons of oil the adverse economic and environmental impact would be very large. So we paid a lot of attention during that period to just how long we could use those buoy tenders before we really needed them to go back and start tending buoys again.

Q: That's a fascinating point. Do you know of any studies that have been done on that theme, that as required work is neglected, accidents go up, or vice versa?

RADM Cross: We have standards that were developed over time that we try to maintain, we try to maintain aids on station about 99.7 percent of the time, and that's another issue that we have to work. We've actually been falling below that standard for the last several years, primarily because we haven't been able to recapitalize NavAids. But we've been close enough so we're reasonably comfortable.

In terms of other numbers, I became concerned - over time - about counter narcotics work, illegal migrant interdiction, and to a lesser extent, fisheries law enforcement, but not in the short-term. In the short-term we needed to respond, re-group, develop our plan, and then work the plan, and that's exactly what we did.

Q: Could you speak a bit to the issue of how hours are budgeted between - the difference between how they're budgeted between - say the cutters and the boat force?

RADM Cross: How they're budgeted?

Q: One of the issues that came up; well here's the boat force surge. One of the things I hear a lot about is that cutters are budgeted for a certain number of operational hours per year whereas the boat force is not.

RADM Cross: Yes. In the past we haven't managed boat hours to the level that we did cutter hours. One of the reasons for that is that boat hours cost a small fraction of what cutter hours cost. I mean a 378-foot cutter with 170 people onboard, that's a very expensive asset, versus a - in some cases - a 21-foot Boston Whaler. There's really no comparison. So we just simply didn't put the management attention on it.

Q: I just want to make sure I get this straight. You're just speaking in basic terms. If you have an hour onboard a large cutter; is there anything comparable to an hour onboard a 21-footer in regards to cost or people and so forth?

RADM Cross: Exactly. Also, as we start the year we publish what we call an Operational Guidance Document. We've done that twice a year now for quite a while. What that is, is general guidance to the operational commanders that says, based on the threat information that we have and our discussions with other organizations in Washington, you should plan on expending about this percentage of your cutter hours on counter-narcotics law enforcement. This percentage on fishery law enforcement and this percentage on national defense, etc. We do the same thing for aircraft. Prior to September 11th we didn't do that for boats. Boats were locally managed and the local operational commanders were given the autonomy to figure out what needed to be done in their area of responsibility.

Q: How has that changed since 9-11?

RADM Cross: Well we're going to be managing the boat hours more closely now.

Q: One of the - if you want to call it an advantage that we had this year that we apparently didn't have before this year - was the Abstract of Operations, which I guess was collected every three months. Starting this year it was collected every 24 hours. Historically we have a wonderful picture of what happened in the days proceeding 9-11 and then you see the spike over time and we can really see, I think, visually, what the Coast Guard did and how it responded. I think what's interesting about that graph and maybe you can speak to that, is that the cutters were back to their baseline hours fairly quickly in about three weeks, whereas the boat force spiked up and maintained that seemingly for several months.

RADM Cross: The boats are still running about 150 percent of program, while the cutters are not. The primary reason, once again, is relative cost. You can't operate the cutters beyond the planned level for long periods of time without incurring huge costs; not only in terms of dollars but in terms of the availability of that cutter down the road. While the cost of additional boat hours is relatively small, more importantly, in most locations boats (vice cutters) are the right tool for the mission.

Q: Could you speak to that in terms of Port Security in the sense that, in the future do you see a lot more patrol boat size cutters?

RADM Cross: Let's talk to our plan. We developed three separate maritime security conditions. Maritime Security Condition One [MARSEC I] is what the Commandant called the new normalcy, and that's the lowest level. Major cutters aren't required to provide MARSEC I for the most part. What is needed is greater small boat presence, somewhat greater aircraft presence, primarily with helicopters, and substantial increases in intelligence capabilities, and we're working to stand that up. But it's not really a cutter issue for the most part. That's why, as we moved forward rapidly to implement our plans, buy more boats and Field Maritime Safety and Security Teams [MSSTs]. That allowed us to return the cutters to other missions; primarily counter-narcotics and alien migrant interdiction and fisheries. One of the reasons we thought that was important is we know that there are links between counter-narcotics for example and illegal migrants to organized crime, and then there are links from organized crime to terrorist organizations. So this is just another element of the threat that needs to be addressed. This isn't a time to run away from doing counter-narcotics or interdicting illegal migrants.

Q: Well that's a good point. In fact that was my next question. Since September 11th, how many - whether its law enforcement treaties, enforcement of fisheries, migrant interdictions and drugs. Have all of those been recast as border security issues now in a kind of macro sense?

RADM Cross: Interestingly, the Coast Guard had cast them along with others as national security missions. In fact even the Federal government in the National Security Strategy identified counter-narcotics, migrant interdiction, and illegal fisheries as national security issues years before this. So you can call them border security issues if you want to, but there are certainly broader national security issues and they all need to be addressed.

Q: I think that the terminology, at least since 9-11, and with the problems the INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service] has had, you see a lot of these issues recast as control of the border, control of the maritime frontier, control of the aviation frontier and so forth, and you can almost see all these missions being recast over time.

RADM Cross: Well we've kind of cast about ourselves in terms of the proper terminology. I mean this is not just Port Security. I think we've settled on something, at least for the short term,

that we're calling "Port Waterways and Coastal Security." Some like the idea of "Maritime Homeland Security" better because we have this term that we think the way to accomplish the mission most effectively and efficiently is to push the borders out so that we're intercepting these problems as far away from the homeland as possible. And in many instances that's the easiest place to intercept narcotics for example. If you're waiting to try to intercept narcotics in the coastal environment or the port environment, that's kind of like playing a football game and giving the ball to the other team every time on your five-yard line. We'd like them to start on their five-yard line, so we have more of an opportunity to stop them.

Q: That's a good point. Some of these terrorists came over here to get their flight training. In the maritime domain do we have or are we developing the capability to sense these people out - say at maritime training schools - if they were going to use a maritime based threat?

RADM Cross: That's work that's ongoing with INS. It's pretty obvious that INS has some issues that need to be addressed.

Q: I don't necessarily mean in this country. I mean wherever people might get their Master's License.

RADM Cross: Well let me say it this way. There's a dramatically increased effort on the part of the United States intelligence community to collect more and better information, and then most importantly to share that information. We're not where we need to be. We're much better than we were last September, but there's a lot of growth and evolution that needs to take place over the course of the next number of years to get where we need to be.

Q: Are you confident that the strategies and the planning are in place to get us to that point?

RADM Cross: I'm not sure I'm a good source of information regarding national strategies. I think from the Coast Guard's perspective I'm comfortable that we're on the right track. Related back to what we talked about before, we had an effort ongoing, for example, to become part of the intelligence community for at least a couple of years, and we were making steady progress. On December 28th that in fact happened. So, the Coast Guard became a formal member of the U.S. intelligence community. Where we started this conversation was you asked me that question about failure of intelligence. The key to keep something like this from happening again is information. We not only need to have the information. The information needs to get to the right people, who can actually do something with it. We had a number of examples over my first year and a half here where information on threats to U.S. ports existed within other organizations yet it was never passed to the Coast Guard. In some cases it was passed to the Navy, who has no authority or responsibility for port security, but it wasn't passed to the Coast Guard. I think we've resolved that issue.

Q: Are these new Maritime Safety and Security Teams, where you see, sort of a nexus of "M" and "O" operations in the future, or are there other areas, the fusion centers and so forth that are ... ?

RADM Cross: Well it's almost everywhere from the intelligence perspective. Currently the intelligence organization resides within "O" and may stay there. But we certainly recognize that "M" is the key customer of maritime security. Port security right now is our highest priority. So, certainly there's a nexus there in terms of the maintenance of the Maritime Safety and Security Teams. Those are primarily law enforcement teams. But in many instances they'll be working under the auspices of the Captain of the Port. These teams will be available to provide increased presence and deterrence, but they'll also be available to augment marine safety boarding teams and respond to cued intelligence aboard vessels. So this is a team that essentially provides

increased force for whoever needs it. It could be the Group commander that needs it or it could be the commanding officer of the Marine Safety Office.

Q: Has there been increased structural coordination between your new operational intelligence people and the "M" people here in the building?

RADM Cross: Yes, but once again the key is to have people in the field. We're in the midst of dramatically increasing the size and the capability of Coast Guard intelligence, including the development of Atlantic Area and Pacific Area Fusion Centers. We will be putting human intelligence agents and information collectors out in the field. Once again, this is part of our three/four multi-year plan that we're rolling out. It's not there yet.

Q: Do you expect to see that intelligence fusion and those capabilities up and running while you're on watch in the Pacific?

RADM Cross: Yes. We'll start to see it within the next year or so, and we would hope to be coming to closure on that in the 2004/2005 timeframe.

Q: Let me ask you, I want to wrap this up with a professional curiosity question. One of your air stations was Air Station Cape Cod and I was there interviewing some of the aircrew last week who had flown out to New York that morning, and in fact I found out that the lead pilot was Canadian. He was in an exchange program from the Royal Canadian Air Force as a helicopter pilot. They were on their way to New York to attempt a rescue and they were thinking about trying to come down and pick people off the buildings. From your experience would that have been doable in a Sikorsky? Would they have been able to . . .?

RADM Cross: Take people off the roof? Sure. Now you had potentially thousands of people in those buildings. I guess we know for a fact you can get 24 people into an HH-60J helicopter.

Q: We know that now. (Laughter)

RADM Cross: Twenty-four small people in the back of an H-60. But I mean the reality is you'd be moving people maybe, what, ten at a time. So that could have been a long effort.

Q: Well I think the interesting thing from the pilot's point of view; they thought that they were grounded because the Air Force grounded everything when they were on their way down, which upset them considerably. But I think they thought that even with the buildings falling down they would have had 20 minutes to a half an hour on scene before the second tower came down. But they were concerned with such things as; they had already figured that there was a north wind. They'd come in on the north side of the north tower and swing their swimmer in the basket over to the building. They learned later that apparently the egresses to the roof had been padlocked, so if people tried to get through they wouldn't have been able to. So they would have been strictly trying to get people out of where windows were broken and so forth. But what the pilot said was interesting. He said, as crazy as it sounded and as dangerous as it might have been, it probably would be a lot easier than a rescue at sea, because on the ocean everything's moving.

RADM Cross: It's true.

Q: Whereas here, nothing's moving except the basket.

RADM Cross: I don't think there's anything more difficult to do - well certainly in helicopter flying - than an over-water rescue at night because it's absolutely black except for the hover lights that

you may have on and the winds tend to jostle the aircraft a bit. But certainly the vessel, or the life raft, or whatever you're hoisting out of is always in motion.

Q: Right.

RADM Cross: It's very challenging. Over-land hoists are a piece of cake.

Q: You were a D-17 Commander?

RADM Cross: I was.

Q: I'm going to interview that commander in the next couple of weeks and we'll probably get to see Valdez.

RADM Cross: I'm sure you will. That was one of our primary concerns.

Q: Well that was my question.

RADM Cross: The primary concern that we had in D-17 . . . in fact early on we had some reports of some suspicious activity in RHIB [Rigid Hull Inflatable Boats]-type vessels. I don't think we ever figured out exactly what it was. It was probably not a threat.

Q: Is that a very difficult port to defend, for lack of a better word, for the Coast Guard?

RADM Cross: Well no. It's actually relatively simple in the sense that it's a pretty closed area. There's not a huge amount of traffic. But certainly a full tanker presents a tempting target and a vulnerable target, and we were concerned about that. But you're in Alaska heading into the winter months when the weather kicks up. So there are a lot of days where it's just not real safe to be out in that open water on a small boat. So no, I don't think it's particularly difficult.

But the other issue is that there are no coastal operational forces in Valdez. There's a Marine Safety Office [MSO] there and a Vessel Traffic Service [VTS]. The Marine Safety Office; I believe they still have a relatively small boat which they actually use to take maintenance people out to the VTS radar sites. That's pretty much all they use it for. So the 17th District Commander had to figure out how to get some forces there to provide some security.

Q: Is the Coast Guard looking at doing that permanently, say stationing a patrol boat in Valdez or Ukisky (phonetic)?

RADM Cross: I'll tell you; over the course of a period of time the Coast Guard Auxiliary just pitched in and did a terrific job up there. We had bought the Coast Guard Auxiliary - I believe - a 25-foot safe boat we'd placed at Whittier, which is not that close to Valdez. But it was my understanding that boat was relocated to Valdez and the Auxiliary assisted, and I think for most of the time there's been a patrol boat that's been working Valdez; one of the 110-foot patrol boats.

Q: Do you see us augmenting operational forces at these strategic ports where there were, say just MSOs?

RADM Cross: Part of what we've done, we had to do, is we've developed a risk matrix and we've identified 55 of the key ports in the United States. It's something like over 90 percent of the goods that are import/export goods flow through those ports and some of them are also Navy ports. So we're concentrating our initial efforts in those ports. We're certainly paying attention to the rest of the ports - but we're concentrating our efforts in those 55 ports. Then, we even took

those 55 and divided them into tiers. So we have 19 of what we call Tier One Ports. And once again, they get more of our attention than others, and Valdez is one of those ports.

Q: And all of those port assessments, where those in the works or were they accelerated by 9-11, or are those things we've done since 9-11?

RADM Cross: We had the information. It was not a great leap for us to sit down and articulate in a clean fashion, when we recognized we couldn't provide substantive Coast Guard presence in all of the 365 ports in the country. I mean there are only 34,000 of us. Do the math. You can't get there from here. So we had to develop priorities.

Q: Let me ask you finally, Sir. I think you may have just answered that. I had a question about operational tempo and it has vanished out of my . . .

RADM Cross: I'll just do something broadly for you. We've essentially directed the Area commanders to return to program levels of operations for cutters and for aircraft. We've given them leeway to operate small boats at a higher op tempo, and we've given them leeway to operate some of the patrol boats at a higher op tempo. Although we've actually cut the patrol boats back pretty substantially because we found out just recently that we have some pretty severe hull corrosion problems with the 110-foot patrol boats. So we've actually had to limit their use and accelerate the yard periods for a number of those boats, particularly the ones in the 7th District.

Q: I've just heard about that problem. Is that something that's come up very recently with the 110s?

RADM Cross: Yes. It's within the last two months or so.

Q: I know what the question was to finish up with is. Did you ever think that port security was going to come back on the radar screen the way it has?

RADM Cross: What I did think and what I hoped was is that we would be able to expand our intelligence capabilities and the nation would expand its information sharing capabilities, and we would have the opportunity to build this maritime domain awareness capability that we talked about in our strategic plan. That if we did that sufficiently, we might not have needed to beef up our port security operation. The Commandant made an observation that's clearly correct. Fifty years ago the Coast Guard was - it would be fair to say that we were primarily a response organization and a consequence management organization. In other words, if people get into trouble or if there's a law enforcement problem, call us, we'll respond. And on those occasions where we fail, then we'll help clean up the mess and try not to fail very often. Maybe 20 to 30 years ago we recognized this prevention idea - in the early 1970s is fair. We had the Commercial Fishing Vessel Safety Act and the Recreational Boating Safety Act - we recognized that prevention was a good thing. Then we became a prevention response and consequence management organization. Well probably, actually as early as three to four years ago we recognized that there was a piece missing, because you can do a much better job of prevention if you were aware of bad things that could happen or were going to happen. So we were trying diligently to become an awareness, prevention, response and consequence management organization as were others in the Federal government, but there was just no momentum. The momentum is there now and we are rapidly becoming, improving our awareness.

Q: Do you think that momentum's going to be maintained? I mean Americans have notoriously short memories of such things.

RADM Cross: If I could predict the future I'd move to Las Vegas!

Q: Essentially you have to predict the future in your budget cycles though, since a lot of these things won't come on line for two or three years.

RADM Cross: Well let me say it this way. We'll find out pretty soon. We got good support in our Fiscal Year 02 supplementals. We got good support from the Administration for the Fiscal Year 03 budget that's on the Hill. We will find out shortly if the Congress is going to support that request. I suspect that they will. And there are always some adjustments made: some ups and downs. I think that'll happen. I think the real proof will come as our Fiscal Year 04 budget goes forward. We'll be sending that to the Department in June or July and then the interaction with OMB will give us an indication of where the Administration is. I think we're going to get strong support through at least 04.

Q: Well thank you Sir. I want to thank you for your time very much. This has been very valuable.

RADM Cross: Well it's a lot more enjoyable for me documenting this.

Q: It's something we need to do a lot more of.

END OF INTERVIEW

